

May 24, 2006
House Education Committee
Chairman Brian Palmer

Dear Representative Palmer:

My name is Bill Peltier.

I come today to speak in support of changing the law to allow for more choices in the use of voter approved sinking funds by local school districts. I am in support of either HB 4575 or HB 5709.

It is no secret that many K-12 districts across the state are in financial trouble. Daily one reads in papers across the state of teachers, custodians, bus drivers, and other school personnel being pink slipped. Schools are being closed. Strange and unique arrangements are being made in order to keep teachers teaching. Some of those involve a shared superintendent, or a single administrator acting as superintendent as well as principal. Districts are subcontracting services and privatizing others. This is all to keep the basic program operating. I have been involved in all of the above over the past 6 years as a superintendent in two districts.

Also, during the past 6 years school districts have seen unprecedented involvement of State and Federal Government in the business of education. From NCLB, to Education Yes! to the new HS Graduation requirements, to CEPI, MEAP, SID, FID, REP, MEIS, GASB, New IDEA, Safety, Fingerprinting, lockdown drills, and on and on.

Schools have and will continue to meet all those changes, but it is time to give local schools a little more flexibility. Allowing Sinking Funds to be used at least for busses and technology just makes sense. Better yet, let districts use that voter approved fund as they now use Bond funds. It would save the cost of the interest and legal fees that are currently needed for a bond. It just makes sense.

Now that students will be required to take a class online, the continued purchasing and upgrading of a district's technology is more critical than ever. General fund money is not available for this. Where is the college for a student in Newberry or Grand Marais, or Paradise if a student in one of those districts wants to participate in dual enrollment or AP Classes?

Providing them online access for rural Michigan is going to be the only choice. Let districts help pay for that technology by using Sinking Fund money.

I was superintendent in a district of 1350 square miles, Tahquamenon Area Schools. Bussing is not an extra, it is an essential. With the price of gas rising, more students are riding since private car use is getting more expensive. Districts like TAS that must provide transportation would like to conserve as much of the taxpayers funds as possible. Currently, their voters have approved a bond, but money could have been saved if a sinking fund was used instead.

I am currently a retired superintendent who has been on a contract running a very small district in the EUP, Moran Township School District. This district has been in existence for 135 years. It has done all it can do to keep teachers teaching and children learning. We are contracting with the ISD for business services; we have contracted bussing from a neighboring district; we have cut support staff, custodial time, secretarial time and paraprofessionals; teaching staff has been reduced and they have taken pay freezes; we have contracted a part-time administrator. The EUPISD has taken a strong lead in collaborative efforts for technology, special education and many other services we can not do ourselves. The voters just renewed its Sinking Fund by a 3 to 1 margin. It renewed its operating non-homestead millage by 4:1. They want the school to remain open. You can make that more likely to happen by allowing districts to use Sinking Funds in a more flexible way.

Thank you for your time!